



Statement by Ambassador Kennedy at the BWC Meeting of States Parties



Ambassador Laura Kennedy at the BWC Meeting of States Parties in Geneva

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Ambassador Laura Kennedy
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, colleagues: I'm pleased to see so many here today – not only representatives of States Parties to the [Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)], but also observers, international organizations, and civil society. Today's biological weapons threat is a complex challenge, requiring a layered, nuanced and integrated response. We need a wide range of partners to advance our shared goals.

I would like to congratulate the Marshall Islands, which last month became the 166th State Party to the Biological Weapons Convention. My delegation looks forward to the day when all countries participate in these meetings as full States Parties to the Convention.

I am particularly pleased to see you, Ambassador Delmi, chairing these proceedings. I am confident that your able leadership will guide us to a successful outcome, and I pledge the full support of my delegation to your efforts.

Colleagues, we are here today to fulfill the mandate given to us by the Seventh Review Conference: to promote common understandings and effective action on cooperation and assistance, on science and technology, on ways to strengthen national implementation, and on participation in the Confidence-Building Measures. This is important work: reaching clear understandings and pragmatic, meaningful actions will strengthen the Convention, and demonstrate the value of effective multilateralism. My delegation will, therefore, be seeking to conclude this meeting with a clear, specific, forward-looking report. Our working papers submitted to the Meeting of Experts included specific proposals for inclusion in the report of this meeting, and I refer you to them.

It is important to remember, however, that while agreeing on new understandings and new actions is important, there is a great deal for each of us to do, acting individually and in like-minded groups, to implement the obligations of the Convention and the understandings already reached. We should never lose sight of that.

Mr. Chairman, the United States remains firmly committed to the undertakings set out in Article X of the Convention, and our assistance and cooperation efforts are wide-ranging. Just last month, the United States and [Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)] agreed to launch the U.S.-ASEAN Innovation in Science through Partners in Regional Engagement, or INSPIRE, initiative. Designed to enhance bilateral science, technology, and health cooperation between the United States and ASEAN's member states, the INSPIRE Initiative includes a range of activities based on three central elements: encouraging cross-border scientific collaboration; promoting an ASEAN scientific "enterprise" linking science, technology, and innovation to drive economic development; and improving our collective response to pandemic outbreaks and disasters.

Our aim at these intersessional meetings is to promote international cooperation and assistance – by identifying needs, addressing impediments, and sharing experiences and opportunities. Our hope, therefore, is that this Meeting will call upon all States Parties in a position to do so to offer advice or assistance in implementing the Convention, and will urge those in need of assistance to take advantage of such offers. We hope those gathered here can also agree on the need to address a specific need identified by the United Kingdom at the Meeting of Experts: the challenges of sustainable biosafety and biosecurity described by the United Kingdom at the Meeting of Experts. We also hope that we will emphasize the importance of the biennial Article X reports requested by the Seventh Review Conference: these reports should be as detailed and specific as possible about opportunities, challenges, and needs – and they should form the basis for our discussions, so that we can grapple with real facts and practical challenges, rather than ideological debates.

Mr. Chairman, the Meeting of Experts held constructive discussions about not only developments in science and technology, but about their implications for oversight, outreach, and education. In particular, a great deal of attention was paid to the issue of "dual-use research" – that is, experiments conducted for legitimate purposes that yield insights or materials that could also be misused for purposes incompatible with the Convention. This is

not a new issue, but it is one that has garnered renewed attention over the past year. Decisions to pursue and fund work that presents substantial dual-use risks must weigh the often-considerable benefits of the research against the risk, and take into account a host of biosafety and biosecurity considerations. This is not an area where there are easy answers. Next week, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is hosting an international consultative workshop to discuss the considerations surrounding a particular type of dual-use research – gain-of-function research on highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses. This event aims to advance a global dialogue on the implications of such research for global public health and fundamental principles for the conduct and oversight of such research. HHS will take the information and perspectives offered at the meeting into account in developing its own framework for making future decisions about funding this type of research. This workshop is not the end, of course – but we believe it will be an important contribution to the ongoing global dialogue.

The BWC has a contribution to make as well. The report of this [Meeting of States Parties (MSP)] should recognize the need for thoughtful approaches that maximize benefits and minimize the risks of dual-use research of concern. It should call upon all States Parties to examine ways of managing these risks throughout the research lifecycle. And we should recognize both the important role that outreach and education can play, and the importance of hearing from the scientific community about what works and what doesn't, when it comes to awareness-raising, and when it comes to developing sound frameworks to manage risks.

Presentations at the Meeting of Experts in July demonstrated that a great deal of progress is being made on strengthening national implementation of the Convention – but it is also clear that a great deal more progress is needed. We need to deepen and clarify our shared understandings of what is required for full and effective implementation of the BTWC. We also need to improve our understanding of the status of implementation across States Parties, so that we can assess the situation, provide encouragement and assistance, and measure progress. The ideas of our French, Canadian, and Swiss colleagues for peer review and assessment processes may be very relevant here. And we need to urge States Parties to take practical steps to strengthen biosafety and biosecurity – not only in the laboratory, but in transportation, sample handling, and at all other stages.

The Review Conference also tasked us to take steps to increase participation in the Confidence-Building Measures. Sixty- eight submitting CBMs out of one hundred and sixty-six is simply not good enough. My government stands ready to advise and assist those who may require support to complete this important task. But simply increasing the number of countries submitting CBMs is insufficient. CBMs do not build confidence unless they are thoughtfully prepared and thoughtfully examined. This MSP should therefore call not only for steps to increase submissions, but also steps, such as automation, open publication, and voluntarily-funded translation, that will facilitate greater understanding and thus build confidence.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to the four substantive items on our agenda for this meeting, the Review Conference identified a fifth topic, to be addressed in the second half of the

intersessional period: “how to strengthen implementation of Article VII, including consideration of detailed procedures and mechanisms for the provision of assistance and cooperation by States Parties.” My government knows, from experience with international responses to a variety of international disasters and public health emergencies– that it is also a difficult one. If we are to achieve meaningful results in 2014 and 2015, we should begin now to identify barriers to prompt, effective international response.

The United States has had some experiences in recent years that are highly relevant.

- The devastation from Hurricane Katrina and an outpouring of international assistance on a scale we had never before experienced. My government received offers of assistance from over 150 governments and international organizations – and discovered that we had no procedures to evaluate, prioritize, or manage such offers. The lesson here applies equally to response to a disease outbreak, whether deliberate or natural in origin: In many cases, assistance – no matter how welcome – poses enormous logistical or regulatory challenges that cannot be addressed in the midst of a crisis. Based on this experience, the United States developed, and is continuing to refine, an International Assistance System – an internal framework under which we have examined some of those logical and regulatory challenges, developed general policies and priorities, and for the first time created a formal, organized system to manage international offers of emergency assistance.
- Similarly, our efforts in response to the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the disaster in Japan following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami exposed gaps in our preparedness plans and policies to provide international assistance, particularly those related to the coordination with United Nation Agencies and other partners, and to the international deployment of medical personnel and emergency provision of medical countermeasures – areas where we are currently working to develop internal frameworks to ensure coordinated, effective responses.

These experiences have underscored to us the importance of preparedness and advance planning at a global level – particularly in identifying key challenges or obstacles and finding solutions – not only for providers of assistance, but also for recipients. We look forward to providing further information about the challenges we have encountered and the solutions we have developed at next year’s Meeting of Experts.

Colleagues, I think of this week as a test of whether we can live up to the high expectations that were set by the Review Conference, of whether we can agree on ways to promote common understanding and effective action across such a wide range of important topics. I think we can, and I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals.